

Washington, DC -- U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) voted yesterday for bi-partisan legislation to reauthorize federal agricultural programs for the next five years (the Farm Bill), including key improvements to the Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) program for dairy farmers, investments in locally produced alternative energy, and enhanced food security programs for those in need.

“Over the past year and a half, I have listened to farmers, small business owners and rural community members across the district regarding their needs in the Farm Bill,” **Arcuri said**. “I am proud to vote for legislation that addresses the unique needs of Upstate farmers and communities – making sure we strengthen the safety-net for local dairy farms and improve specialty crop programs for our vineyards and orchards. Investing in new biomass energy production will create economic opportunity and good paying jobs throughout the region.”

Since taking office, Arcuri has worked with colleagues from both sides of the aisle to ensure the needs of local farmers and families were met in the final Farm Bill. Arcuri hosted Agricultural Roundtables in Herkimer and Cayuga counties where he brought together local dairy farmers, organic and vegetable farmers, with representatives from diverse governmental, business, and educational organizations. This Farm Bill is strongly supported by the New York Farm Bureau.

Agriculture remains the number one industry in New York State – employing twelve percent of the workforce and generating over \$3.6 billion in economic activity each year.

After working steadily to protect the interests of local dairy farmers in reauthorization of the Farm Bill, Arcuri successfully expanded and improved the MILC program – the federal safety-net for local dairy farms. With approximately 6,800 dairy farmers, New York ranks third in milk production nationwide.

“Family farms in Upstate New York need a safety net when prices fall and costs increase,” **Arcuri said**

. “This bill will help by tying MILC support to feed costs, making sure that if feed prices go up, price support goes up and if feed prices go down, support can go down as well. Family farms are financially stretched to the breaking point by sky-rocketing fuel and feed costs, and I will continue to do all I can to make sure our farmers have the support they need.”

During House consideration of the Farm Bill last August, Arcuri was joined by fellow Upstate representative Kristen Gillibrand (D-Hudson) in offering an amendment to the Farm Bill requiring the MILC program to take feed and fuel costs into account when setting price supports. The Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee agreed to work with Arcuri and Gillibrand during conference negotiations to address the cost of production issue.

The final Farm Bill conference report approved by the House yesterday includes a new provision for the MILC program that will take into account feed costs as a factor in triggering price support payments. Rising feed costs, fueled by skyrocketing energy costs, are a continuing strain on local dairy producers. The MILC program's new "feed cost adjuster" will be based on the price of corn, hay alfalfa, and soybeans – main feed sources for local farmers.

The Farm Bill also raises the payment rate under the MILC program from 34 percent to 45 percent, greatly improving federal support for local farms during price fluctuations. The size of herds covered by the program would be increased from 120 to 165 cows.

**In addition to vital improvements in the MILC Program, the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (H.R. 2419) would help farmers in New York by maintaining or expanding critical programs.**

Fruit and vegetable producers will have their own place in the Farm Bill for the first time and will benefit from more than \$1.3 billion for new programs. The bill authorizes \$466 million in mandatory funding for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, which provides grants to states to support projects in research, marketing, education, pest and disease management, production, and food safety. The value of New York's tree fruit and grape production totaled \$329 million in 2006.

The Farm bill increases conservation program spending by \$7.9 billion – improving funding and access to preserve farm and ranchland, improve water quality and quantity, and enhance soil conservation, air quality, and wildlife habitat on working land. This bill doubles funding for the Farm Protection Program to protect agricultural lands from development pressure and continues funding for Grassland Reserve and Wetlands Reserve programs.

The Farm Bill increases funding for nutrition programs by \$10.4 billion and indexes appropriate benefit increases to the cost of living. This legislation updates the food stamp program to reflect the current state of our economy. These critical food stamp provisions will help about 11 million

people by 2012. Households with children receive 77% of food stamp benefits. According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, 1.8 million New Yorkers (26 million Americans) rely on food stamps to help them purchase a nutritionally adequate diet. In addition, the Farm Bill includes critical assistance to food banks hit hard by rising food prices and increased demand. It also mandates country-of-origin labeling for meat and produce to strengthen American production and protect consumers.

The Farm Bill provides \$1.1 billion to fund programs that will help the renewable energy industry invest in new technologies that use a variety of sources beyond feed grains. This includes \$320 million in loan guarantees for biorefineries that produce advanced biofuels and a new program to encourage the production of new biomass for cellulosic ethanol and other energy production, helping producers learn how to harvest, store, and transport biomass to bioenergy facilities.

The Farm Bill also contains long over-due reforms to reduce government waste and abuse of taxpayer money. This bill begins to end payments to farmers who don't need the help, with the most significant reforms in over 30 years. It reduces the cap for non-farm income by 80%, to \$500,000, and puts in place the first-ever cap for farm income at \$750,000 for fixed direct payments.

The Farm Bill is fully paid for, does not increase federal spending, and does not add to the national debt.

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